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Genealogic Tree and Social and Psychological Aspects of Family Functioning

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Abstract

The article presents the view on genealogical tree as a unique social community. We consider the genealogical tree as a complicated organism which has its own trajectory of development in social and historical environment. We consider also, that it reflects the family history across several generations by various forms of personal activities: seeking and finding a spouse partner, reproductive and parental activities, education, career and migration mobility. Because of a great variety of personal responses, there must be different types of genealogical trees, which we will try to identify.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary investigations of family history in its psychological aspect deals mainly with two or three generational families: elder generation, parents and children – close relatives available for real direct contact. So, the main aim of such works – is to prove the existence of the intergenerational transmission of different kinds of behavioral deviation [1] influence of divorce and separation on mental health [2], [3], [4], or some kind of extreme experience, for example trauma of Holocaust [5], [6]. Our investigation includes 7-4 generational families and based on data presented by family memory of several generations. Despite the influence of memory

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disturbance mechanisms we consider the material of family history as a text or myth which directs and determines the lives of now leaving family members, therefore analysis is valid.

Life stories, family stories, family history and other kind of biographical materials are the matter of great interest of contemporary human sciences. The main investigational approach to such kind of information – is a qualitative, ideographical or hermeneutical method. Such kind of approach despite of its advantages does not correspond to the classical investigational approach, based on various estimation procedures, that allows to analyze stable aspects of different family histories, its developmental modus, to compare and typologies them.

1.1. Method and sample

Genealogical tree presents obvious information about multigenerational family functioning with relation to birth, marriages, deaths and names. This article is based on the materials gathered with use of the genogramm, a subjective version of the genealogical tree, where the family history is presented according to several rules. We add the traditional version of genogramm with some modification. The instruction invites a subject to draw the generational tree of his/her family beginning from the very first family member using the traditional signs representing the man and woman, births and deaths, lines of marriage, cohabitation and divorce, while maintaining generational lines. In the following procedure each member of the genogramm gets his number and on a separate sheet of paper the subject is asked to write all available information about each member of genogram.

Fifteen volunteers, women of Russian origin between the 25-26 age, presented their 15 genogramms, which contained short life stories of 1012 persons of different age and social status. We use the obvious data and content analysis to estimate characteristics of the genogramm through many aspects of personal functioning, for example education, career, migration, war participation, etc. Such type of analysis allows us to carry out the following estimation.

1.2. Results

The results of this research are divided to three stages. The first contains the description of the system of estimation and the descriptive statistics of the results of 15 genograms: variables and indexes. The second shows the results of correlation analysis of genogramm indexes, and the final deals with the results of the attempt to find out types of genograms with the help of cluster analyses.

The list of variables and descriptive statistics is reported in Table 1. Each block of variables is resumed by appropriate index which derives from mathematical sum of variables divided by a number of members in the concrete genogramm, that makes it possible to compare the genogramms and indexes between each other.

Results indicate that using genogram as a subjective version of the genealogical tree presents significant information about family history. It can be estimated by different variables and indexes. We can see, that the mean number of genogramm members in our sample is 67.46, family memory includes five generations covering more than 113 years. Men and women compose approximately equal parts of the tree (see Matriarchy index). Monogamous model of family system, monogamous index, have low rating in comparison with five types of nonmonogamous models: 0.19 vs. 0.26. The reproductive index 0.60 shows the rate of born children on each member of the tree, so couple gives life to 1.2 children - an extremely low rating. Extensive reproduction needs at least 2.3 rating for a couple. Each genogramm in sample has its peripheral part which consists of nonidentified members, the person, about whom no information is available, except the fact, that he was born, or was a spouse partner, banished and deviate person. We consider them as destructive power of the family and a sign of family illness. Therefore, this sample demonstrates an extremely high level of disturbance 0.27, meaning that 27.8% members of each family tree are not accepted by their wider family unions on emotional level.

Because of high rates of death and disease mentioned correspondent variables and indexes were used to estimate the level of psycho-somatic health of the multigenerational family. We suppose the longtime health problems, early child death, and tragic death of adults to be a significant indication of family mental health. The psycho-somatic health index of our sample with a value of 0.11 shows rather low degree. Meaning that nearly 11% of the sample experience the various phenomena of health disease or/and mental problems.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for genogramm variables and indexes

Variables	Mean	SD
Number of family members in genogramm	67.46	37,38
Number of generations	5. 00	1,00
Number of men	34.20	19,57
Number of women	33.26	18,34
Matriarchy index	1.00	0,24
Number of monogamous spouse couples	15.33	8,78
Number of monogamous parental couples	13.26	7,95
Monogamous index	0.19	0,07
Number of births	41.26	25,06
Reproductive index	0.60	0,06
Chronological age of the tree (years)	113.40	20,59
Number of single living adults	3,06	3,95
Number of cohabitations	1,73	2,25
Number of divorces	5,53	4,15
Number of second marriages	2,80	2,04
Number of single parent families	3,66	2,74
Nonmonogamous index	0,26	0,13
Number of nonidentified members	16,93	14,67
Number of family banished	0,93	2,54
Number of deviate person	1,06	1,22
Family disintegration index	0,27	0,20
Number of somatic disorders, illness	3,40	2,55
Number of early tragic deaths of adults	2,73	1,90
Number of infant deaths	0,93	1,22
Psycho-somatic health index	0,11	0,62
Migration mobility frequency	5,80	5,19
Education activity frequency	7,26	8,18
Career achievement frequency	6,20	4,16
Upstairs social trajectory index	0,30	0,19
Participation in world war, rewards, honorary titles	2,60	3,68
Civil agreement index	0,04	0,07
Number of emigration cases	1,86	6,15
Number of repression cases	0,93	0,88
Civil disagreement index	0,03	0,05

One of most significant themes in family histories is social activity. This theme consists of three variables: migration mobility, education activity, and career achievements. In all the cases of migration described in shot life stories, long wave migration from villages or small towns to mega policies took place, that allows us to consider it as a phenomenon of social activity. All the three variables show a rather high level of motivation for social success of its members which was named after P. A. Sorokin [7] upstairs social trajectory.

Approximately 1/3 of our sample (0.30) demonstrates upstairs social trajectory. By the way it is the matter of great interest to compare these findings with data from other cultures. Two final index report the relationship between human life and the state. We consider it very important to estimate this part of personal life particularly in Russia. Available data shows approximately equal meaning of both indexes of civil agreement or disagreement. Nearly 4.4% of each tree members demonstrates personal practices of civil agreement and 3.2% - personal practices of civil disagreement.

The second stage of the investigation is intended to control statistical independence of the genogram indexes, to be certain that each index estimates the independent sum of measured variables. The results are reported on Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation matrix of the genogram indexes

Indexes	MI	MGI	RI	NMI	FDI	PHI	USI	CAI	CDI
Matriarchy index	-								
Monogamous index	-.18	-							
Reproductive index	-.31	.50	-						
Nonmonogamous index	.52*	-.24	-.43	-					
Family disintegration index	-.06	-.26	-.28	.34	-				
Psycho-somatic health index	.04	-.23	.02	.03	.00	-			
Upstairs social trajectory index	-.11	-.14	.25	-.36	-.71*	.23	-		
Civil agreement index	.35	-.19	-.26	-.01	-.26	.41	.30	-	
Civil disagreement index	.10	.13	-.13	.06	-.05	-.17	.11	-.01	-

We found out only two significant statistic associations between the genogram indexes. Matriarchy index and Nonmonogamous indexes are positively correlated (.52, $p < .05$), meaning that women are the prevail members of nonmonogamous family models. This fact corresponds to reality; most single parent families are mothers families. The second correlation (negative) is found between the Family disintegration index and Upstairs social trajectory index (-.71, $p < .01$). In fact upstairs social trajectory indicates the social health of the family, it can demonstrate the signs of social wellbeing but only in the cases of strong family solidarity and support.

The final stage of the investigation is devoted to attempt to find out types of genograms on the base of worked out variables and indexes. Figure 1 presents Tree Diagram for 15 genograms of our sample. We use complete linkage cluster analysis in order to have the typology of our data material.

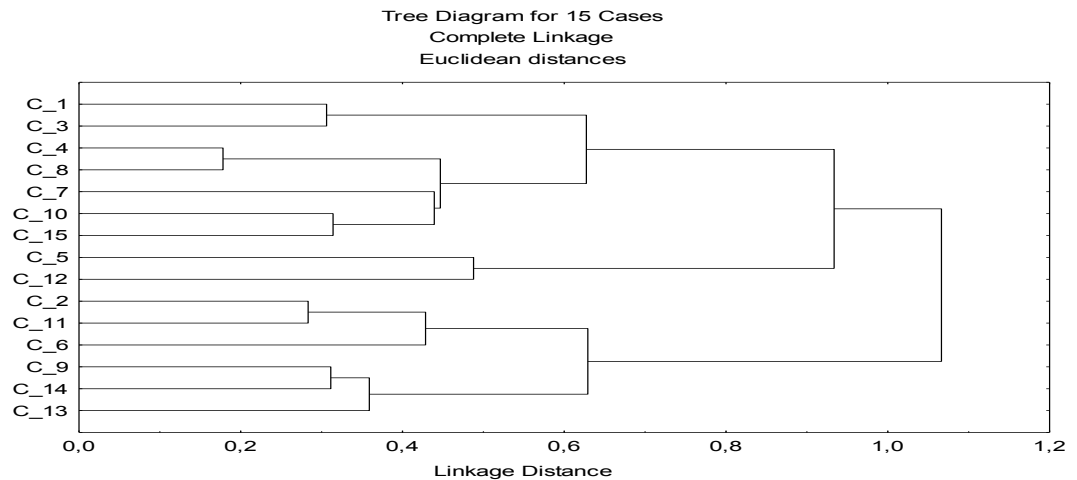


Fig. 1. Cluster analysis of 15 genograms.

The results reveal 6 small clusters that can be united into two big clusters, which can be named as clusters with high (genograms № 2,11,6,9,14,13) and low (genograms № 1,3,4,8,7,10,15) level of psychological and social health. The typical features of the first cluster is high number of Monogamous family models, low Family disintegration index (high level of family solidarity) and extremely high level of Upstairs social trajectory index. The second cluster unites the genograms with high number of nonmonogamous models (divorces, remarriage, single mother families and lonely living adults), high incidence of not identified members, high rate of illness and death rates, low upstairs social trajectory index.

1.3. Discussion

This article presents the attempt to assess the genogram as the complicated social and psychological organism. We try to work out the instrument to estimate its different aspects: demographical (reproductive index), sociological (monogamous/nonmonogamous indexes, social trajectory index), somatic and mental health (psycho-somatic health index) and political aspect (civil agreement/disagreement indexes). We perceive a variety of directions to continue this investigation. Our future goals are: a) expand the sample to have possibility to explore the genograms of people of different sex, age, ethnic status, etc. b) try to estimate validity and reliability of genogram as an investigation instrument by testing siblings, for example; c) work out the procedure of assessment of the phenomena of intergenerational transmission, analyzing every generation separately and look for correlations between the variables, d) add the factor of the historical time in the analyses, for our genogram materials cover the historical time that include the first and the second world wars, October revolution and social crisis of 1990-s named «perestroika»; e) and finally, we stay in total awareness about the subjective character of genogram method, so personality measuring of respondents and semantic analysis of text following the genograms would be also undertaken.

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